

Fruits of Nostalgia

Renewing Duxbury's Ecological Concerns

By REV. CANON ROBERT MERRY.

The *Duxbury Clipper* has many features uniquely available to a small town newspaper. Among these are the broad and detailed coverage of town and personal events, the practice of wide photographic coverage of news or activities (if you're active in town affairs, you're bound to see yourself at least twice a year here), and nostalgic events, mostly submitted by the town's "old timers." Here is where I speak from personal experience because it was here that the *Clipper* editor gave me my first beginnings as a writer. I remember well my first assignment describing the 1978 Blizzard and our dealing with similar natural disasters when I was a lad. John Cutler thanked me for my story and then said, "Now I like your writing and I will print anything you write from now on so long as it is nostalgic."

The 40th anniversary of this journal was a convincing portrayal of this aspect of the newspaper and this essay is a report on how nostalgia can be more than a recollection of the past. It can actually trigger events in the present. In fact, we are in a period of nostalgic reminiscence and recollection all over our country in the refurbishing of old land marks, and the restoration of almost forgotten historic sites. We are in a great movement of recovery of our past. This report is not so much a rediscovery of the past as a renewal of an awareness. This awareness began under the leadership of Frederick Knapp, then headmaster of Powder Point School and the then Duxbury Rural Society and was continued under Lansing Bennett and others, but is currently enjoying renewal spurred on by John Joline, Lands Chairman of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society and a member of the town's Open Space Land Committee, and Joe Grady, the town Conservation Officer.

Their leadership in the town's celebration of Earth Day began with the "Sunrise Salute to the Earth" held at North Hill and climaxed by the afternoon clean-up of our woodlands. One hundred to 200 people, young and old, took part plus the Columbus Day weekend Fall Foliage Festival, which were all splendid examples of a revitalized and renewed environmental consciousness. So before too much water has flowed under the bridge, I thought it might be of interest to *Clipper* readers and others to know how it all began. To summarize it in a sentence: It all began quite unconsciously with a nostalgic search.

I have titled this essay, "Fruits of Nostalgia" to emphasize that quite often actions directed in one direction (in this case, pursuing a nostalgic recollection), can result in a totally different end. It was over 10 years ago that I took my retirement in this my native town and early on I began to seek out vestiges of my earlier life (the slippery ways of ship-building days in "Blue Fish River," foundation post of gunning stands on Duxbury Beach, for example) and Round Pond and the trails leading around the Marsh to North Hill. Almost no one knew the whereabouts of Round Pond and 60 years of living elsewhere had obscured all recollections of the logging trail from Mayflower St. to North Hill. So one day I pushed my way into my high leather boots and drove over to that curve in Mayflower St. from where I knew the road to Round Pond had to be. Parking my car in the brush, I noted tons of broken glass nearby. I noted several heaps of rubbish as I walked on and bits of broken furniture, including a rusting porch glider. A few yards away in the bush I discovered the remnants of a wall-papering venture, complete with long pans, cans of paste and slivers of paper cuttings. I pushed on to Round Pond itself and stopped beside the spot where my father's ice house used to stand. I was sick to see the rotting logs that lay about.

On my way back home, I stopped at the transfer station and received reassurances that they would indeed help me out by taking any and all debris that I uncovered in the woods. Digging deep into my memory, I did also find the road from here to North Hill. Noting the beauty and charm of this rural scene I spoke to town officials about cutting trails for popular enjoyment of these woodlands. I offered the thought that many people could be turned on by these sylvan vistas, and couldn't we do something about it. I was firmly informed that much of this area was privately owned, and what was public was controlled by groups jealous of their prerogatives of possession who would not welcome a movement indiscriminately tramping about their turf.

I am not crystal clear about persons or chronology on what happened next, but 2 liberating things happened about this time. 1.) The late Joe Lund left a large parcel of land bordering North Hill Marsh to the Audubon Society. 2.) I was appointed chairman of the Lands Committee by Norman Peterson. I protested weakly to Norman (because I knew this would legitimize my prowling the woods) saying that 50 years as a minister had hardly prepared me for life as a woodsman. I said, "Norman, this is crazy, you are guilty of mistaken identity: you want my brother Stan." But he was

adamant. "Talk to Sam Pillsbury and Charlie Wood and they'll help you do the job," he said as he walked away. And indeed they did come to my rescue in a big way. Charles Wood spent most of a day showing me Duxbury Rural and Historical lands and Sam Pillsbury spent many hours working with me and my brother Stan and his bulldozer burying trash and smoothing out trails. Charles also spent many hours researching deeds of private lands in the area.

Moving far ahead in time I want to note here that David Stookey who succeeded me as Lands Chairman, researched and made a complete survey of Duxbury Rural and Historical Society's lands, comprising some 250 acres. The largest sections of this survey was Round Pond and Lapham Woods.

Now a big boost came from the appointment of Dave Clapp as director of Mass. Audubon. Dave had just completed a "Green Belt" type of trail system for the town of Sharon and was enthusiastic about our woodlands. The late Brad Martin, our Tree Warden, also showed real interest, as well as Frank Lesueur, the town's recreation director. So we decided we needed to get all these people together despite warnings that we would encounter resistance. We phoned everyone concerned (the Conservation Commission, the Town Forest, Audubon, and Stan Merry, owner of Waiting Hill) to join us at a Dutch lunch. To our surprise, everyone came and to make a long story short -- plans were made for trails with markings, and parking lots off Mayflower St. To reassure our private landowners we spent several hours over 2 or 3 weeks laying down use restrictions. About this time, Joe Grady also came on board and town departments joined in. Jim Kelso, then completing his term as selectman, took a real interest, emphasizing the fact that Duxbury has so many acres of woodlands that could be made available for public use.

Plans for our new coalition of woodlands, in which all landowners would pool their resources, were presented to the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society executive board. With just the right amount of hesitation, it was agreed that we would act with all others to renew our woodland commitment of so many years ago and unlock the treasures of our rural areas for public use -- cleaning them and turning them over to responsible people.

We held 2 or 3 dedicatory ceremonies, in which we were especially grateful to Dave Clapp for the gift of a large kiosk with proper pamphlets explaining the valid use and outlining the trails. We held a Foliage Fiesta informing people of the new facilities for jogging and walking. We felt widespread support for our venture. Meanwhile scores of people on the staff of the town and

large kiosk with proper pamphlets explaining the valid use and outlining the trails. We held a Foliage Fiesta informing people of the new facilities for jogging and walking. We felt widespread support for our venture. Meanwhile scores of people on the staff of the town and many from the public at large donated their services. The state gave a grant for the completion of a town map that would depict all land holdings and by means of different colors, indicate whether they were private, town, educational, or recreational. Historic spots were also included and all in all it represented Duxbury's resources in a way never shown before. Joe Grady will deny this, but it is really his achievement.

Now the most significant thing happened in recent Duxbury woodlands experience, and it stems from our early meetings to develop plans for our open space lands. While we had many public land parcels, including Audubon, there was one desirable area that was privately owned and I refer to Waiting Hill. With developers buying land all over town and the planning board finding it difficult to keep open land -- especially for our aquifer supplied water -- this one piece of land amounting to over 200 acres was the one remaining parcel of this size that could assure our future water supply. Here were 2 people who were chiefly responsible for persuading the town to obtain it. Judi Barrett and Shawn Dahlen came

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to town meeting and in a masterful display of charts and films, convinced voters and taxpayers to spend the necessary \$3,000,000 to acquire this tract of desirable land. This indeed brought our land holdings so far that we now own more open land than any other town in this area.

It was about this time that I was showing some friends the Myles Standish homesite. My dog, Wendy, a Welsh Corgi, got entangled in a friendly way with a neighbor's dog. That man, John Joline, who I knew slightly at St. John's Church, invited us into his house. When I asked him what kind of a day he had had, he said he'd been walking the woodland trails of the town. I immediately put this fact in my mental file, and discovered he would be taking his retirement in little over a year. I mentioned our project to him and he expressed interest. He offered to help when retirement came. At that time, he was limited only to weekends. I felt bad that there had to be this long delay, until John could take an active role in reshaping our woods for general public use.

In due course, the months went by and John did take his full retirement and after a great deal of arm-twisting, assumed the chairmanship of the Lands Committee of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society.

He has organized volunteers into teams called "Woodland Walkers" and the Columbus Day Foliage Festival on Oct. 8 was a good illustration of his organizational finesse. Between 50 and 100 people turned out. Cars were assigned to various people and trails were described. Trips were taken first to the Trout Farm trail area, then to Waiting Hill parcel (this involved 2 cars), then on to the newly developed walk with Kingston at Bay Farm. Another group went to Whiton Woods, close to the Marshfield line, and another went to Round Pond, and Audubon area. Ginger snaps and cider were served by Betsy and Fred Stevens as they have done on these occasions many times before. Perhaps we set forward a little further the care and concern that can help make Duxbury's woods an important aspect of our quality of life again.

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Perhaps this town's renewal of its ecological consciousness could have been accomplished in some other ways, but this is a brief account of what actually did happen, acknowledging that there are omissions for which I herewith offer my apologies. I think it is a good illustration of the principle that "One person can make a difference." This is indeed true of cleaning up our lovely woodlands. We hope this story will inspire many to look to our rural vistas and incorporate some of them into their lifestyle, either walking or jogging.

This is further a good example of how "nostalgia can work." I looked up the origin of the word in the Webster's Unabridged Dictionary in the *Clipper* office and found it comes from 2 Greek words: *nostos* and *algos*. "*Nostos*" means, "a return" and "*algos*" means "grief or pain." Webster defines the word as "homesickness." Perhaps we can think of it as an attempt to discover where one's real home is -- a seeking the security a real home provides. My search for Round Pond was this attempt to rediscover "home." As the saying goes, "Home is where the heart is," and this rediscovery has led many to seek as well for their home in a happy sylvan glade.



The official opening of Audubon and Town Land trails was enjoyed by (l to r) Elden Wadsworth of the Conservation Commission; Frank Lesueur, recreation department director; Sam Pillsbury of the Lands Committee; The Rev. Canon Robert Merry, Lands Committee chairman; David Clapp, Audubon Society director; Crad Martin, Land and Natural Resources director; Al Borjeson, former head of tree department; Joe Grady, Lands and Natural Resources assistant director; Charles Wood of the Historical Society; and Town Historian Katherine Pillsbury.

Photo by Dent Johnson